

Activist group targets U.S.-Israeli war machine in Massachusetts

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Nine activists with Palestine Action U.S. were arrested earlier this week during a rally at the Cambridge office of Elbit Systems

Cambridge, November 3 (RHC)-- In the U.S. state of Massachusetts, nine activists were arrested by the Cambridge Police Department during a rally organized by Palestine Action U.S. at the Cambridge office of Elbit Systems, Israel's largest arms company.

The protesters face a litany of charges, including assault and battery on a police officer, possession of an incendiary device, resisting arrest and disorderly conduct. Those arrested have pleaded not guilty to all charges.

Palestine Action U.S. responded to the charges in a statement, saying: “Elbit Systems is guilty, the U.S.-Israeli war machine is guilty, and the CPD [Cambridge Police Department] is guilty. We affirm our right to take action against Elbit and all weapons companies, and we will not let police intimidation deter us.”

The group calls police claims of assault “fabricated lies” that were “reprinted by the mainstream media [in order to] criminalize us for protesting against genocide.” The group claims that videos that were taken at the protest establish that it was police who violently attacked the crowd.

Activists say that when protesters attempted to remove metal barricades that blocked access to the sidewalk, alongside the building, dozens of the police charged the crowd, tackling and pepper spraying protesters.

Members of Palestine Action U.S. affirm that during this onslaught, some officers “tripped over their own feet,” and subsequently blamed protesters for knocking them down.

According to Palestine Action U.S. organizer Fergie Chambers, the charges referring to a so-called “incendiary device” likely refer to a “smoke bomb” — a type of firework that produces smoke of a particular color — which was left lying on the ground. “These cannot harm a person,” he said. “We are not targeting human beings,” Chambers said. “We are not trying to hurt anyone. We will not hurt anyone ... We make a huge distinction between human life and property.”

Over 200 people had gathered to protest at Bishop Allen Drive and Prospect Street, which is a major thoroughfare in Cambridge. On the day of the protest, businesses located in the building where Elbit holds a lease advised employees not to come to work, leading activists to call the protest an effective, day-long shut down of the Elbit location.

Palestine Action U.S. is a new formation, taking inspiration from the direct action-oriented group Palestine Action in the UK. Palestine Action U.S. was organized in recent weeks, amid Israel’s ongoing, genocidal siege and bombardment of Gaza, which has killed more than 9,000 Palestinians.

So far, the group has focused its efforts on the Elbit Systems office in Cambridge, but Chambers says that new chapters are being organized throughout the United States, to target other Elbit hubs in the United States.

“We would like to see people everywhere on earth escalate their opposition to this,” he said. Chambers emphasized that while mass marches are important, direct actions targeting “the Israeli war machine” are also essential. “We want to see people marching in the streets by the hundreds of thousands, that’s really good, and we want to see more.”

In addition to Massachusetts, Elbit Systems has locations in New Hampshire, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Texas, Florida, Alabama, and South Carolina.

While Palestine Action U.S. is targeting Elbit systems to protest the ongoing genocide in Palestine, Elbit’s tools of occupation are also being deployed in the United States. As Antony Loewenstein documents in his book, *The Palestine Laboratory*, Israeli defense contractors test their wares on Palestinians and then export their tools of surveillance and warfare around the world. Loewenstein highlights the connection between so-called border security in the US and the oppression of Palestinians, writing, “Israeli technology was sold as the solution to unwanted populations at the US–Mexico border where the Israeli company Elbit was a major player in repelling migrants.”

In her book *Border and Rule: Global Migration, Capitalism, and the Rise of Racist Nationalism*, Harsha Walia describes how U.S. Customs Enforcement officials impose the violence of bordering on Tohono O'odham lands, along the U.S. Southern border. Walia wrote, "US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) has contracted Israel's largest private arms company, Elbit Systems, to construct ten surveillance towers, making Tohono O'odham one of the most militarized communities in the US."

In 2017, members of the Tohono O'odham Hemajkam Rights Network (TOHRN), went to Palestine on a visit organized by the Palestinian group Stop the Wall. TOHRN member Amy Jaun told Antony Loewenstein that it was a relief to talk "with people who understand our fears ... who are dealing with militarization and technology."

In 2022, after years of resistance from Tohono O'odham organizers, the construction of the contested surveillance towers was completed. As Will Parrish reported in *The Intercept* in 2019, each tower is outfitted with thermal sensors, high-definition cameras with night vision, and ground-sweeping radar. As Parrish noted, "The system will store an archive with the ability to rewind and track individuals' movements across time — an ability known as 'wide-area persistent surveillance.'"

The Tohono O'odham's struggle against the construction of Elbit's towers is just one example of how the company is exporting Israel's tools of bordering and occupation. In *The Palestine Laboratory*, Loewenstein describes an event at the Paris Air Show in 2009, where Elbit screened drone footage for "an elite audience of global buyers." The footage showcased the assassination of a Palestinian. A subsequent investigation by Andrew Feinstein, a global expert on the arms industry, who observed the sales video pitch in Paris, revealed that innocent Palestinians, including women and children, were killed during the drone attack that Elbit showcased at the Paris Air Show. Feinstein told Loewenstein, "This was my introduction to the Israeli arms industry and the way it markets itself. No other arms-producing country would dare show actual footage like that."

As evidenced by the construction of surveillance towers in Tohono O'odham lands, Elbit's work extends beyond the bounds of war, but the lines between war-making, surveillance and what governments call "security" are murky, at best. When tools of war and subjugation are tested on a captive population, and marketed on the basis of how effectively those people are killed, how do we expect those tools to be deployed globally?

According to Loewenstein, "In May 2020, Israel admitted that it aimed to expand its defense exports specifically tracking civilians. Aside from Iran, Syria, and Lebanon, every country on the planet was deemed fair game for sales."

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